

*Issue topic: International perspectives on social education*

# POSITION PAPER

*Position paper*

Czech version/Česká verze 

The role of social pedagogues at primary schools

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In the previous text, Tomáš Machalík outlines the problems that are linked with the position of social pedagogue as a full-fledged pedagogical employee at Czech schools (mostly we are speaking about primary schools). It is interesting that no one doubts that we need a professional who follows up on students' risky behaviour, communicates with parents and other stakeholders, and supports students in unfavourable situations, i.e. takes care of their social dimension at school. I have never heard from teachers, headmasters, ministerial officers, regional school prevention coordinators, etc. that schools don't need somebody like this. It is therefore surprising that the social pedagogue has not been included in the Act on Pedagogical Staff so far. Despite this, some schools are looking for a way of obtaining a social pedagogue. The Association of Social Pedagogue Educators published in February 2020 a document (available from [www.asocped.cz](http://www.asocped.cz)) in which they try to make it easier, especially for headmasters, to get a general idea about the role of social pedagogues at primary schools. This role was discussed with social pedagogues working at schools (despite legislative and financial obstacles) and should reflect concrete activities as faithfully as possible. This role is being published in this issue, to be of use not just for headmasters but for students and graduates of social pedagogy study programmes.

**The role of social pedagogue according to the relationship of individual activities to other actors in school life**

**ROLE IN RELATION TO SCHOOL MANAGEMENT**

The social pedagogue is dependent on the headmaster's initiative to establish this position based on project activities or negotiations with the education authority. It is necessary to clearly define the competences of the social pedagogue and to further inform the educational staff. The role of the social educator and his/her activities must be understood by the teaching staff as beneficial, rather than threatening or unnecessary. The content of the work and the way the social pedagogue works is determined by the headmaster. The headmaster is the direct superior of the social pedagogue and determines the way in which his/her work is controlled.

**Accountability for the work done**

The social pedagogue is accountable to the headmaster.

**ROLE IN RELATION TO TEACHERS AND OTHER TEACHING STAFF**

Solving pupils' problems related to their risky behaviour, communication with their surroundings and their relationships, exceeds the competencies and time possibilities of classroom teachers and others. A clear definition of the competences of the social pedagogue facilitates more effective communication between the social pedagogue and teachers (especially classroom teachers). Cooperation between the teachers and social pedagogue is crucial to prevent teachers from having to deal with student issues related to their social functioning, at the expense of teaching activities.

**Working with the school and class climate**

The social pedagogue is engaged in diagnostics and the transformation of the school and class climate. Based on the current state of the class and school climate, the social pedagogue can set a climate work plan which focuses on

	relationships, environment and other areas (given the current and individual needs of classes). The social pedagogue contributes to better learning outcomes for pupils and the more effective cooperation of all actors in the educational process.
<b>Teacher counselling</b>	The social pedagogue provides assistance and support for teachers, related especially to the prevention and resolution of the risky behaviour of pupils, the impact of a difficult family situation on pupils, communication with parents, the PPP (pedagogical-psychological counselling centre), OSPOD (the Authority for the Social and Legal Protection of Children), and the Police of the Czech Republic. The social pedagogue implements educational and developmental programmes for teachers.

### ROLE IN RELATION TO PUPILS

The main part of the work of a social pedagogue is working with pupils, which can be divided into work with an individual, a group or the whole class. This involves primarily social education and preventive activity that does not interfere with the competences of a school psychologist, prevention methodology, etc.	
<b>Individual work with pupils</b>	The social pedagogue seeks neglected pupils from socially disadvantaged and threatening environments. He/she provides individual help and support to pupils who are in a difficult situation (i.e. unfavourable family situation, problems with classmates, integration problems). The social pedagogue cooperates with the pupil and his/her family on a long-term basis, correcting the unfavourable family situation to improve the educational conditions of the pupil.
<b>Group work with pupils</b>	The social pedagogue, in cooperation with the school prevention methodologist, plans and implements preventive programmes for pupils, focused especially on the prevention of risky behaviour. The social pedagogue plans, organizes and implements leisure activities and projects intended to improve the social relations between pupils, the school and class climate, and prevention (including the implementation of adaptation courses, school trips, etc.)
<b>Crisis intervention</b>	In case of emergency (i.e. escape of a pupil from home), the social pedagogue cooperates with OSPOD (the Authority for the Social and Legal Protection of Children), Police of the Czech Republic, etc. If necessary, he/she implements

crisis intervention directly in the school environment.

**ROLE IN RELATION TO PARENTS**

The social pedagogue is a key link between the school and the pupils' parents. He/she is a consultant, mediator and facilitator; moreover, he/she contributes to openness and effective cooperation between the school and parents.

**Interviews with parents**

The social pedagogue conducts interviews with the parents of those pupils who require support in difficult situations (educational problems, truancy, drug use, aggression, delinquency, problematic family background, etc.). The interviews are preventive so that the problems of the pupils are resolved promptly, or the problem arises. The social pedagogue conducts an interview with the parents in the course of fieldwork at the pupil's place of residence or school. The aim is to determine the progress of the school and the family, in order to solve a particular problem of the pupil.

**Fieldwork**

The social pedagogue visits pupils' families on a regular or one-off basis (as needed). The measure is supported when parents do not cooperate with the school, or the pupil has learning or behavioural issues. Fieldwork often contributes to a better understanding of the pupil's family environment and his/her problems in a wider context.

**Educational committee**

The social pedagogue participates in the educational committee. He/she should know the pupil's family environment in detail and propose a solution to the problem using this knowledge (usually the educational committee is preceded by several measures and negotiations with parents, while the social pedagogue is sufficiently familiar with the character of the pupil's family background).

**ROLE IN RELATION TO OTHER ACTORS**

External experts with which the social pedagogue most often cooperates include the OSPOD (Authority for the Social and Legal Protection of Children), the Police of the Czech Republic, PPP (pedagogical-psychological counselling), SVP (educational care centres) or low-threshold facilities for children and youth, and community event centres. Collaboration is important for community outreach and depends on the needs of a particular school.

**Communication with OSPOD, event. Police of the Czech Republic**

The social pedagogue cooperates with OSPOD (or with the Police of the Czech Republic), especially in the case of neglected pupils from a threatening environment, the unexcused

	absence of the pupil, truancy, or the risky behaviour of the pupil.
<b>Communication with the PPP and SVP</b>	The social pedagogue cooperates primarily with the regional prevention methodologist in coordinating preventive activities at school. The social pedagogue cooperates with representatives of the SVP in setting the conditions for the optimal development of pupils in the care of the SVP.
<b>Communication with field social workers, low-threshold facilities for children and youth, etc.</b>	The social pedagogue cooperates with field social workers in the catchment area of the school (cooperation is focused on the occurrence of socially pathological phenomena potentially endangering pupils and families of pupils in socially excluded localities). He/she cooperates with low-threshold facilities (communication is aimed at preventing risky behaviour).

#### ROLE IN RELATION TO MEMBERS OF THE SCHOOL ADVISORY WORKPLACE

The social pedagogue can fulfil his/her role in the school counselling centre because of his/her preventive, socially educational and counselling activities.

<b>Social pedagogue at the school counselling centre</b>	The social pedagogue participates in meetings of the ŠPP (school counselling workplace), provides information to ŠPP members and performs activities according to the headmaster's instructions.
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#### ROLE IN RELATION TO THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

The social pedagogue participates in projects of cooperation between the school and the local community.

<b>Collaboration with the community, development of the community, promotion of social cohesion</b>	The social pedagogue meets with representatives of local associations, organizations and public institutions, and participates in the planning and implementation of projects that will link the educational offer and material background of the school with the educational, cultural and social needs of people living in the locality. In this way, it promotes the character of the school as an open community institution that links the life of the school and the community for social cohesion, the cooperation of local partners, and improvement of the quality of life of people in the locality.
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### Responsibilities of a social pedagogue, according to activity

1. **Educational activities** (realization of educational and other programmes and projects aimed at pupils, teachers, families and the community).
2. **Socio-educational and preventive activities** (implementation of educational and preventive activities aimed at increasing the social skills of pupils, shaping their healthy lifestyles, and preventing social exclusion, xenophobia, racism, etc.).
3. **Support, intervention and protection activities** (providing support to pupils and their families in difficult life situations, support to pupils of national minorities, intervention in cases of children and adolescents endangered by risky behaviour, etc.).
4. **Counselling and mediation activities** (resolving conflicts between actors in schools and school facilities, social and pedagogical counselling for individuals, families and the community).
5. **Re-education activities** (programmes, projects and activities aimed at rebuilding the maladaptive habits, cognitive patterns and behavioural strategies of children and adolescents).
6. **Analytical-diagnostic and screening activities** (analysis and diagnostics of the school environment and climate, school classes and educational groups, searching for neglected children and adolescents from a socially disadvantaged and threatening environment).
7. **Coordination and organizational activities** (cooperation with municipalities and professional services in planning and implementation of primary and secondary prevention programmes, cooperation with actors of tertiary prevention – Probation and mediation services, curator for youth, OSPOD social workers and the non-profit sector).

The spectrum of activities for social pedagogues in primary schools is wide. It reflects a number of areas that teachers and other teaching staff currently have to address in their school, and that go beyond their time and professional competences. Graduates of social pedagogy study programmes are purposefully prepared during their studies at universities for the above-mentioned activities. The schools that have introduced the benefits of the position of social pedagogue to teachers, pupils and parents have given us positive feedback.

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